Wandering the Web -- To Your Good Health: Health Websites for Parents, Teens, and Kids

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publications and content sources can seem overwhelming. But many institutions are navigating through these difficult issues, even as they sometimes stumble along the way. But does this constitute a crisis? An opportunity or, again, a challenge feels like a better word.

From the publishers' standpoint, there was less terminological ambiguity. No respondent felt that there is a crisis at this point. Again, there are weighty issues to be confronted, particularly by learned societies and smaller publishers that are unable or ill-equipped to adapt to industry changes such as digital workflows, online discovery tools, and alternative business models. These struggles may have unforeseen consequences within the broader scholarly communication realm over the longer term, of course. As one respondent points out, "If these niche publications are an important part of the ecosystem, what happens when they disappear? What happens to their authors and their readers? Are they as well or better served in larger consolidated publications, or by some other form of publication entirely?" These are good questions that we would be wise to keep an eye on.

Again, to be clear, no respondent painted a smiley face on our industry's current state of affairs. There are serious concerns that impact both libraries and publishers. However, the general consensus was that crisis is too strong a word.

Does traditional scholarly publishing matter?

There was near unanimity among the group that traditional scholarly publishing still matters. The emphasis, though, was on the function of the publisher, not the form. The publisher serves as a tool to disseminate information, to promote legitimacy on new ideas and arguments, to ensure certain standards of peer review, to collect materials bound together by certain characteristics and make that content discoverable, and so forth. These functions, in turn, inform decisions about tenure and promotion, research funding, hiring, and other essential elements of the research world.

Many of the respondents, however, questioned the traditional forms of scholarly publishing. For example, do monographs still matter? Does subscription-based print distribution still matter? What about the packaging of a traditional article in a traditional journal? On these points, our panel was less certain. The conventional role of the scholarly publisher remains very relevant, in their eyes, even as the means by which that role is fulfilled may be changing.

To quote one of the respondents, "If 'traditional' means publishers certifying trustworthy content and maintaining and stewarding the scholarly record, then it's more important than ever. The Web is awash with junk and the need to be a filter. Formats will change, data is becoming more important, semantic tagging, blogs, and wikis are all having a huge impact, but nothing looks close to replacing peer review and the idea of the Version of Record as the backbone of our system."

In one word, how would you describe the future of scholarly communication?

The answers to this question were as follows, listed alphabetically: different, dynamic, exciting (twice), experimental, flux, multi-faceted, necessary, network, reinvention (twice), torrent, and vital.

It is interesting that these one-word responses foresee an environment that is fertile, interesting, challenging, complex, and unwritten. This is what I will take away from this roundtable exercise. Scholarly communication — driven in part by technology, in part by economics, and in part by the insight and acumen of people like our panelists, and like you in our audience, for that matter — is in a fascinating period of reinvention. This transformation is in part due to the lessons we have learned over a prolonged period of crisis, but it goes beyond that. We have talked about so many of these issues for such a long time, and now the focus seems to be shifting toward action. Innovations in business models and content delivery are here. We are experimenting with better ways to process and make sense of disparate forms of information. We are developing and implementing tools to make every step of the scholarly communication process more efficient. Not all of these innovations will succeed, and even the ones that do will have their trials along the way. But it is terrific to see the enthusiasm with which our collective future is being met.
The CDC Website is another massive source of health information for classroom use, but the linked printed material may be too hard to read for younger kids. Text-only and Spanish versions are available.

Safes for Teens

TeensHealth - http://kidshealth.org/teen/ - TeensHealth is the teen portion of KidsHealth, produced by the nonprofit Nemours Center for Children's Health Media. Written and reviewed by physicians and other health professionals, TeensHealth educates teens with about health conditions, fitness, body changes during puberty, sexual health, and other issues. Includes healthy recipes for teens, including those with diabetes and other health conditions. TeensHealth is also in Spanish.

Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers - http://www.teenhealthandwellness.com/ - Teen Health & Wellness is a subscription Website produced by Rosen Publishing Online, a publisher of self-help materials. Library Journal chose this site as one of its “Best Reference Sources” in 2007. "Teen Health & Wellness" is oriented toward educational use by teens in grades 6 through 12, and materials support curricular guidelines. Information is written by adults in conjunction with a teen advisory board and reviewed by an expert medical team. Articles are short, readable, and presented in a clean, attractive layout. Topics include diseases, mental and physical health issues, and related issues of common interest to teens; subjects such as Internet privacy are also included.

Go Ask Alice! - http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/ - The oldest major health Website, "Go Ask Alice!" began in October 1993 (a month after the advent of the World Wide Web) as a Q&A site for Columbia University students. On this immensely popular site, the staff of counselors, social workers, and other specialists at the Alice! Health Promotion Program at Columbia University, a.k.a. "Alice," answer questions about sexuality, personal relationships, drugs, fitness, and general health. Targeted to older teens and young adults "Alice" is a health & Q&A Internet resource that works to provide readers with reliable, accurate, accessible, culturally competent information so that they can make informed decisions (from the site’s Facebook page). "Alice" is lively, youth-oriented, and contains sexually explicit and controversial material.

Planned Parenthood Teen Talk - http://www.plannedparenthood.org/teen-talk/ - "Teen Talk" is the teen-oriented portion of Planned Parenthood, an international nonprofit organization. It provides English/Spanish information about birth control, abortion, sexual health, and women's health. Health care providers and services are also listed. "Teen Talk" also has pages on Facebook and MySpace. "Teen Talk" also links to parents' and educators' pages.

Sex, Etc. - http://www.sexetc.org/ - Based at Rutgers University, Sex, Etc. is subtitled "Sex Education by Teens, for Teens!" It is sponsored by Answer, (formerly the Network for Family Life Education), begun in 1981 by a member of the New Jersey Board of Education and now nationwide. Sex, Etc. is a long-running site focusing on sexual health written by teens and reviewed by medical experts. Sex, Etc. contains sexually explicit material.

TeenHealthFX - http://www.teenhealthfx.com/ - Colorful, popular site begun in 1999 and co-produced by adults and teens for Atlantic Health. Includes local information for northern New Jersey (some for-profit) but also general interest. Links to other teen Websites, including health sites. Questions and answers by category (health and illness, emotional health, etc.) with searchable archives. Includes sexually explicit material.